TL 5002

Christian Consultation on East Timor

Analysis of the current context in Indonesia & East Timor

Opinion is divided on whether Indonesia's current crisis is an opportunity or a threat to securing progress on East Timor. Certainly during the first few months of the Indonesian financial crisis, before the demise of Suharto, it had proved very difficult to maintain East Timor's media profile, as it seemed to drop off the international agenda. The behaviour of the EU around both the ASEM meeting and the Commission on Human Rights, which appeared so anxious to play down Indonesia's human rights record, whilst doing everything possible to preserve the status quo in Indonesia and protect investments, even if that meant supporting the continuation of Suharto's corrupt and despotic reign, seemed to preclude attention to East Timor's own problems. This was in spite of the British presidency's pledge to inject more urgency into finding a solution to the diplomatic impasse. Visitors wishing to discuss East Timor were often turned away by British officials at the FCO, and the troika visit of EU ambassadors was postponed at least twice. East Timorese at CHR54 experienced the volte-face on the resolution as a betrayal, and could not understand the wide discrepancy between the rhetoric and reality of stated governmental policy.

However, now that Suharto has fallen, and President Habibie has made initial promises to stamp out corruption and nepotism in the Indonesian state, chickens are beginning to come home to roost. We heard last week that the British Water Company, Thames Water had lost a contract secured through irregular channels involving Suharto's eldest son, Sigit Harjojudanto, to supply Jakarta with water. Derek Fatchett, British Junior Foreign Office minister was the first foreign minister to visit Jakarta in an attempt to rescue business deals in danger of foundering because they have been concluded through contacts with family and friends of Suharto.

Habibie has released two famous political prisoners - Sri Bintang Pamungkhas, jailed for defaming Suharto, and the trade union leader Muchtar Pakpahan, and promised a general election. Now there is a question as to whether Xanana Gusmao will be released, and whether new initiatives can be expected from Habibie on East Timor. Governments led by Portugal, including the US, Australia and Britain have called for the release of Gusmao. But Gusmao has put conditions on this: he will only come out of prison provided that a) his security is guaranteed on his return to Dili, b) that there is a substantial, if not total, reduction of Indonesian troops in East Timor and c) that an internationally supervised act of self-determination is facilitated in the near future. Whatever Habibie may be willing to concede, there is still considerable resistance in the military to any change in Indonesia's East Timor policy. More broadly, for Habibie's survival, the question is whether enough reforms will take root soon enough to avert further economic decline and instability around a president who appears to have few friends among either the military or the democracy movement.

The East Timorese living in the diaspora have recently held a consultation to organise them in the light of the changing situation. The CNRM has changed its name to National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT), and UDT has recognised Xanana Gusmao as paramount resistance leader. The resulting 'Magna Carta' declaration is appended. Inside East Timor there is apprehension, and a fear that the changes afoot will not necessarily be of benefit to East Timorese.

Update on Activities: February - June 1998

Human Rights Working Group

UN Commission on Human Rights 54

Considerable time and effort on the part of the secretariat was put into lobbying prior to CHR54, in liaison with ETHRC and the members of the CCET Human Rights Working Group. Catherine Scott & Maria Brett were present in Geneva with East Timorese lobbiests during the first half of the session, when all the indications were that the draft resolution proposed by the European Union was gathering considerably more support than last year. Lobbying was concentrated on African, Eastern European and Latin American governments, and many that had abstained or voted against last year were prepared to support the resolution this year, in recognition of the total lack of implementation of human rights pledges made in previous chairman's statements on the part of the GoI.

Unfortunately, as many of you will have heard, the British Presidency of the EU secretly negotiated a chairman's statement, new of which only came to light a matter of days before the end of the commission. The British government believes that the statement is a major achievement as it contains a pledge to invite the UN Working Group on Arbitrary detentions to East Timor before next year's commission. However, the East Timorese were dismayed at the outcome and felt betrayed by the EU presidency. Many human rights groups (for example, Amnesty International) have denounced the outcome because Indonesia has always ignored chairman's statements, but more importantly because of the signal it gave to the then ailing Suharto regime, that it could depend on EU governments to give it an easy ride on human rights, even as the Indonesian people themselves were gearing up to overthrow the dictator. A further reason for lobbiests to feel justifiably angry is that the British officials lobbied appeared less than honest about the direction that negotiations were proceeding. CIIR took this up with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, and a full report of our meeting with the official responsible is appended.

Visit of Rev. Arlindo Marcal

Rev. Arlindo Marcal, leader of the Protestant churches in East Timor, was invited to the UK by the Methodist Church. The CCET secretariat organised for him to meet activists in the UK involved in lobbying and advocacy on East Timor, and briefed him as well as Methodist church officials prior to their visiting the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

ASEM

The CCET secretariat was represented at the Alternative State Dinner organised around the ASEM meeting in London at the end of March/beginning of April by the British Coalition for East Timor, the Tibet Support Group, the Burma Action Group and a number of others. The keynote speaker was Jose Ramos Horta, who met with Robin Cook earlier in the week. Press work around Ramos Horta's visit was undertaken, but was very difficult, as the main stream media had shown relatively little interest in the inter-government Asia-Europe Meeting itself.

Aid Working Group

INFID Meeting

The CCET/CIIR was invited to present a paper at the 11th meeting of the International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development on the importance of the East Timor issue in Europe. The meeting, which took place at the beginning of May, and at which Amien Reis was present, was extremely interesting given the fluid situation in Indonesia. Many representatives from Indonesian NGOs were present, along with European, US and Australian Aid Agencies. There was a full and frank discussion regarding East Timor, and CCET was able to input into the draft statement on East Timor. The resulting document was the strongest statement that has ever been made on East Timor by INFID. (See appended).

Arms Trade Working Group

Monitoring of Code of Conduct discussions.

The CCET has been monitoring developments on the EU Code of Conduct on arms sales, and given interviews to the church press in the UK on the outcome, which has been a rather weak agreement which is not legally binding. It was watered down by the French government, and although originally conceptualised by the British government as a move towards reducing secrecy around arms sales, involving full multilateral consultation, does almost nothing to bring this about. It has been greeted as a step, but no more than a first step, in the right direction.

Appendices

Report on UK FCO/HRPD account of the CHR.
Text of the Consensus Declaration
JRH's letter to Robin Cook
INFID Statement.
Magna Carta.